*This bulletin, and back issues,*
*can be found in the Lotus Notes-based*
*United Nations Information System*
*on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) at:*
*http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/pub_bltn.htm, as well as*
*on the Internet (http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/).*

# I. ACTION TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

*On 9 February 1999, at its 243rd meeting, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People opened its 1999 session with statements by the Secretary-General, delivered by Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, on his behalf, the Chairman of the Committee and the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations.*

*The Committee re-elected Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal) as Chairman. Also re-elected were Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Ravan Farhâdi (Afghanistan) as Vice-Chairmen and George Saliba (Malta) as Rapporteur. The Committee also approved Yemen's request to be an observer.*

*The Secretary-General's statement, as contained in press release SG/SM6889-GA/PAL/790, and the statement made by Mr. Ka, translated from French, are reproduced below:*

Secretary-General's statement

Allow me first to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your unanimous re-election to the leadership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The renewal of your mandate reflects the Committee's appreciation of your dedication, and that of your country, Senegal, to the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. My congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau.

The fifty-third session of the General Assembly has remained actively involved in matters relating to the question of Palestine, reflecting the abiding commitment of the United Nations to the cause of peace, security and stability in the Middle East. The Assembly resumed its tenth emergency special session, demonstrating the international community's mounting alarm at the worsening of the situation on the ground and the lack of progress in the peace process. The General Assembly also adopted a resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000", in support of efforts to mark the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. I know you share my hope that this event will be a powerful symbol of peace and reconciliation, within and beyond the region.

The year just past has seen its share of frustration and despair. But it is also true that the Palestinian people took significant steps towards the achievement of their goals. Here at the United Nations, the General Assembly conferred upon Palestine, in its capacity as observer, additional rights and privileges of participation. In Gaza, the opening of the international airport was a landmark heralding new trade and cultural relations.

As for the negotiating process, the signing of the Wye River Memorandum following a protracted stalemate offered hope that the momentum of peace would be recaptured. But, regrettably, in the course of the past several weeks, we have witnessed yet another standstill in the peace process. I appeal to the parties to summon again the will and the wisdom to move ahead without delay, in accordance with the agreements already signed.

It is crucial that the parties remain committed to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We must not lose sight of the gains the peace process has brought thus far. Nor should we forget that success in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations could lead to progress on the other tracks. Indeed,

too much is at stake for the process to falter yet again. Real progress must be our goal. Real, tangible progress is the best antidote to violence and the best answer to the forces of disruption, destruction and doubt.

Nearly one year ago, I had the pleasure of visiting several countries in the Middle East, as well as the territory under the Palestinian Authority. The leaders and others with whom I met were unanimous in thinking that animosity and mistrust can be made a thing of the past through a resumption of bilateral negotiations. But there was also considerable exasperation at the enormous difficulties encountered in achieving even the slightest headway, and real anguish at the failure to find a durable political solution.

I also witnessed the hardship and deprivation caused to the Palestinian people by decades of conflict. I came away even more convinced that the improvement of economic and social conditions is a central element of the peace process. Some progress has been made in this regard: in creating employment opportunities, in improving health and education facilities; and in promoting industrial development and Palestinian institution-building. But much is yet to be accomplished.

Last November, in Washington, D.C., 43 nations participated in the Conference to Support Middle East Peace and Development. The meeting brought an estimated $3 billion in new pledges of assistance. This was a welcome and encouraging contribution. The United Nations, for its part, continues to be fully engaged in helping to build the foundations of peace. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations entities are involved, providing vital services to millions of Palestinians.

In closing, I need remind none of you that the question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations since the earliest days of the Organization. Palestinians who have lost their homes and hopes find themselves in the tragic position of passing on to future generations only family histories and their unmet aspirations for peace. I say let this be the generation that knows the end of a terrible, costly conflict. Let this be the generation that finds peace and prosperity. Let the generation of today bequeath to their sons and daughters not the yearning for peace, but peace itself.

Committee Chairman's statement

On behalf of the Bureau, I have the pleasure to introduce the draft programme of work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for 1999. The programme reflects the ongoing concerns and objectives of the Committee in the light of the evolving situation, as discussed on many occasions during the past year. The programme of work has been discussed by the Bureau of the Committee, and with your permission I would now like to briefly describe its contents.

**Section I** is largely procedural and summarizes the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly adopted at the fifty-third session containing the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information.

**Section II** outlines issues of priority in the Committee's programme of work for 1999. It reflects the Committee's concern at the freezing of the implementation of the Wye River agreements and stresses its intention to remain engaged in the follow-up to the recommendations of the Tenth Emergency Special Session, especially the convening of the conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. The section also emphasizes the need to achieve maximum effectiveness in the programme of meetings and other activities. It refers to the inclusion of the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly and the adoption, without a vote, of resolution 53/27, also entitled "Bethlehem 2000".

A reference is also made to the need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Division for Palestinian Rights.

**Section III** deals with the proposed activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. In *sub-section A*, the draft indicates that the Committee will continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine, report to the General Assembly or the Security Council, draw urgent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, to the attention of the international community and continue to participate in important international meetings, as considered necessary.

In cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, the Committee will continue to expand contacts with the Palestinian Authority and other institutions, including NGOs, in the areas under its jurisdiction and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. In particular, the Committee would invite Palestinian officials to its meetings and give consideration to the possibility of visiting the Palestinian territory in conjunction with one of its meetings in the region.

The Bureau of the Committee will also continue its consultations with members of the European Union and other countries interested in the programme of work of the Committee, with a view to promoting understanding for its objectives and greater participation in its activities.

The Committee will convene a high-level Bethlehem 2000 International Conference at FAO Headquarters in Rome, on 18 and 19 February 1999. In this regard, the Committee expresses its great appreciation to the Government of Italy for having agreed to provide the venue for this important event and hopes that it will contribute to the successful implementation of the Bethlehem 2000 project.

*Sub-section B* contains details on the meetings and conferences to be organized in 1999. In order to achieve greater impact through its events and heighten its responsiveness to developments in the peace process and on the ground, the Committee has decided to further restructure and consolidate its meetings programme. It also examined questions of periodicity, format of and participation in these meetings, as well as modalities for cooperation with NGOs. The calendar of meetings and conferences to be held by the Committee in 1999 will be as follows:

- The Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, Rome, 18 and 19 February 1999;
- The African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Windhoek, Namibia, 20-22 April 1999;
- A thematic event followed by an assistance seminar in the Middle East, June 1999.

*Sub-section C* deals with the Committee's cooperation with NGOs and stresses the importance of the role played by NGOs in mobilizing international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the achievement of its inalienable rights.

The sub-section refers to the need to develop the most effective means of such cooperation. The need is stressed to reach out to a broad spectrum of civil society and to provide assistance to Palestinian organizations. In the light of that, the Committee will restructure its NGO programme, including its programme of meetings, in order to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness to evolving political realities. The Committee will also develop new and more flexible ways of communicating and cooperating with NGOs on an individual basis, making maximum use of available electronic facilities.

As some programmed NGO meetings will not be held during the year and bearing in mind the need for maximum cost-effectiveness, the sub-section outlines a number of proposed activities to be undertaken utilizing the resulting savings.

*Sub-section D* refers to the need for the Division for Palestinian Rights to accelerate its work on the UNISPAL to determine the scope of the United Nations and other relevant documentation to be included in its collection and to suggest a time-frame for the completion of this activity. It requests the Division to make an effort to complete the current stage of its work on the project of modernizing the United Nations Conciliation Commission records.

*Sub-section E* describes the various elements of the programme of work of the Division for Palestinian Rights with regard to the preparation of publications, studies and other information material and the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, with regard to the annual commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Committee recommends that it be observed on Monday, 29 November 1999, and that the usual programme of activities be envisaged, including a Palestinian cultural exhibit.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Bureau, in the course of the past several months, has given much consideration to the various elements of the Committee's programme of work in an effort to make it more effective and responsive to the evolving situation. I would like to express the hope that this draft will be acceptable to the Committee and that it can be adopted at this meeting.

*The Committee adopted its programme of work for 1999, as contained in document A/AC.183/1999/CRP.1, dated 29 January 1999, which is reproduced below :*

Programme of work for 1999 of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

**I. Mandate of the Committee**

1. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the year 1999 is contained in General Assembly resolutions 53/39, 53/40 and 53/41 of 2 December 1998.

2. In its resolution 53/39, entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People", the General Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee contained in chapter VII of its report; requested it to keep the situation relating to the question of Palestine under review and to report and make suggestions to the General Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to make such adjustments in its approved programme of work as it might consider appropriate and necessary in the light of developments, to give special emphasis to the need to mobilize support and assistance for the Palestinian people and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session and thereafter. It also requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to mobilize international solidarity with and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and to involve additional NGOs in its work. The Assembly also requested the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine and other United Nations bodies to continue to cooperate fully with the Committee and to make available to it, at its request, the relevant information which they have at their disposal.

3. In its resolution 53/40, entitled "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat", the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continued to carry out

its programme of work as detailed in relevant earlier resolutions, in consultation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and under its guidance, including, in particular, for the organization of meetings in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community; the further development and expansion of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine; the provision of assistance in completing the project on the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine; and the provision of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

4. In its resolution 53/41, entitled "Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat", the General Assembly requested the Department, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as might be required by developments, its special information programme for the biennium 1998-1999 and indicated a set of activities to be carried out under the programme.

## II. Priority issues in the programme of work of the Committee for 1999

10. The Committee believes that the cooperation and coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Division for Palestinian Rights should be strengthened. The Committee has also requested that the Department give particular attention to the preparation of audio-visual and other informational materials aimed at the general public.

5. The Committee has reviewed the various aspects of its own programme of work and that of the Division for Palestinian Rights, as well as of the mandates governing them. The Committee believes that a number of adjustments in this programme are necessary in order to optimize its responsiveness to the evolving situation in the peace process and on the ground and its effectiveness in promoting the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

6. The Committee strongly believes that, as humankind prepares to enter the new millennium, it is incumbent upon the co-sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the international community as a whole to do everything within their power to achieve peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. In this context, the Committee expresses the hope that the Wye River Memorandum, signed on 23 October 1998, will be fully implemented, provide the much needed impetus to the Oslo process and help the parties to move forward to the negotiations on permanent status issues, which should conclude by 4 May 1999. The Committee expresses great concern at the breakdown of the peace process following the freezing of the implementation of the Wye River agreements. It will continue to emphasize in its various activities the importance of the full and timely implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements signed to date.

7. The Committee expresses its full support for the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session and states that it will continue to remain engaged in the follow-up to those recommendations, especially the convening of the conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

8. The Committee is of the view that its programme of meetings in the various regions and its cooperation with NGOs has played a useful role in heightening international awareness of the relevant issues. In the light of this, the Committee stressed the need to achieve maximum effectiveness in the programme of meetings and other activities and to respond adequately to developments on the ground and in the peace process.

9. In response to the call by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian

Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, for the holding of the millennial celebrations at Bethlehem in the context of global peace and reconciliation, the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" was included in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly at the request of the Committee. The Committee notes in that regard the adoption, without a vote, of General Assembly resolution 53/27 of 18 November 1998, entitled "Bethlehem 2000". The Committee will continue to support the Bethlehem 2000 Project and will devote some of its activities to mobilizing wide international support for this historic event.

## III. Activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights

### A. Action by the Committee

11. In implementation of its mandate, the Committee will continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to participate in relevant meetings of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Committee will also continue to monitor the situation on the ground and draw the attention of the international community to urgent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, requiring international action.

12. The Committee considers that its participation in high-level conferences and meetings, an important aspect of its effort to promote international support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, should be continued.

13. The Committee will continue, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, to expand its contacts with the Palestinian Authority and other institutions, including NGOs, in the areas under its jurisdiction and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. The Committee will consider inviting Palestinian officials and other Palestinian personalities to meetings of the Committee on particular occasions, as required. The Committee will also give consideration to the possibility of sending a delegation to visit the Palestinian territory at an appropriate time, in conjunction with one of its meetings held in the region.

14. The Bureau of the Committee will continue its consultations with countries interested in the programme of work of the Committee, including members of the European Union, with a view to promoting understanding of its objectives and greater participation in its activities.

15. The Committee has convened the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, to be held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, on 18 and 19 February 1999. The Committee expresses its great appreciation to the Government of Italy for its support in organizing this event and hopes that the Conference will contribute to the successful implementation of the Bethlehem 2000 Project, as well as promote international public awareness with regard to the plight of the Palestinian people and the urgent need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

### B. Meetings end conferences

16. In order to achieve greater impact through its meetings and conferences, as well as to heighten its responsiveness to developments in the peace process and on the ground and to be more inclusive with respect to all relevant actors, the Committee has decided to further restructure and consolidate its meetings programme. Accordingly, the Committee examined questions relating to periodicity, regional breakdown, format and participation, as well as modalities of cooperation with NGOs.

17. As authorized by the General Assembly, the Committee, in the past, has made adjustments in its meetings programme in order to respond to new developments. In 1999, the Committee will continue to strive, in cooperation with prospective host countries and institutions and the competent Secretariat services, to limit costs for conference facilities, equipment and servicing staff, while ensuring the success of the meetings.

18. The Committee considers that, in the light of the success of the Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held at Brussels on 24 and 25 February 1998, which introduced a new format and gained high-level participation and support, it will emphasize thematic events in the course of 1999 and seek to encourage involvement by additional countries and organizations, including those which have not so far participated fully in the programme of work of the Committee

19. Keeping in mind General Assembly resolution 53/27, entitled "Bethlehem 2000", and the importance of the Bethlehem 2000 Project launched by the Palestinian Authority, the Committee will hold a major activity devoted to supporting the Project and thereby promoting peace and reconciliation on the eve of the new millennium. As noted above, the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference will be held at FAO headquarters in Rome, on 18 and 19 February 1999.

20. The Committee will hold an event for the African region in Windhoek in April 1999, with the support of the Government of Namibia. In the light of the above-mentioned objectives and priorities of the Committee, this event will be called the "African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People".

21. The Committee is of the view that another thematic event and an assistance seminar should be held in Cairo, tentatively in June 1999.

22. Accordingly, the calendar of meetings and conferences to be held in 1999 will be as follows:

(a) The Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, Rome, 18 and 19 February 1999;

(b) The African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Windhoek, 20 to 22 April 1999;

(c) A thematic event followed by an assistance seminar in the Middle East, June 1999.

23. The Committee is grateful to the Governments of Italy and Namibia for having agreed to provide the venue for the above-mentioned meetings to be held in their respective capitals.

24. The Committee will also explore the possibility of holding joint events with the Department of Public Information in order to maximize participation and impact.

### C. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations

25. In the context of its overall programme review, the Committee examined the modalities of cooperation with NGOs. The Committee stresses the importance of the role of NGOs in mobilizing international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the achievement of its inalienable rights.

26. The Committee will continue to develop the most effective means of cooperation with NGOs, including reaching out to a broader spectrum of civil society, in order to maximize support for the work and objectives of the Committee, as well as to ensure concrete follow-up to meetings and provide needed assistance to Palestinian organizations. In that regard, the Committee will restructure its NGO programme, including its programme of meetings, to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness to evolving political realities.

27. Accordingly, the Committee requests the Division, in consultation with the Committee, to develop new and more flexible ways of communicating and cooperating with NGOs on an individual basis, making maximum use of available electronic facilities.

28. As some programmed NGO meetings will not be held in 1999, it is proposed that the Committee, bearing in mind the need for maximum cost-effectiveness, utilize the resulting savings for the following:

(a) Participation by a representative of the Committee and/or the Division for Palestinian Rights in significant conferences, meetings or other events organized by NGOs and other civil society organizations;

(b) Assistance to Palestinian organizations in sending representatives to meetings held under the auspices of the Committee and in providing speakers for meetings organized by other NGOs;

(c) Preparation and publication by the Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information, of documentation aimed at the general public that can be reproduced and made available in large quantities;

(d) Periodic visits by members of the Committee and staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights to the territory under the Palestinian Authority to brief local NGOs and institutions on the work of the Committee and to assess their needs that can be met through the Division's programme of work.

29. The aforementioned steps should strengthen the cooperation of the Committee and the Division with the international network of NGOs on the question of Palestine and achieve greater effectiveness in providing support to the Palestinian people.

## D. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

30. The Committee attaches great importance to the continued development of UNISPAL, as mandated by the General Assembly in 1991. The Division for Palestinian Rights will continue to expand the UNISPAL documents collection and will further develop the question of Palestine and UNISPAL sites on the Internet. The Committee requests the Division, in consultation with the Committee, to continue to identify and include in the collection old documents relevant to the question of Palestine. The Committee further requests the Division to accelerate its work on UNISPAL, determine the scope of the United Nations and other relevant documentation to be included in the UNISPAL collection and suggest to the Committee a time-frame for the completion of this activity.

31. The Committee also requests the Division to continue its work on modernizing records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission and to make an effort to complete the present stage of work at the end of the first trimester of 1999. The Committee recommends that any additional documents of relevance to the project be converted electronically and that savings achieved in the Committee's programme of work for 1999 be used for this purpose.

## E. Other activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights

### Publications

32. The Committee considers that the Division should continue to prepare and issue in a timely manner its periodic publications, namely:

(a) Monthly bulletin on action by the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine;

(b) Periodic bulletins on developments in the peace process;

(c) Monthly chronological summary of events relating to the question of Palestine;

(d) Annual compilation of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council;

(e) Reports of meetings held under the auspices of the Committee:

(f) Annual bulletin on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

33. In addition, the Committee requests the Division to continue to prepare its informal periodic

summary of information on significant activities of NGOs relevant to the question of Palestine for the information of the Committee and for communication to the network of NGOs. The Committee also requests the Division to assess the usefulness of this publication, in consultation with NGO users, with a view to improving its format and enhancing its effectiveness.

34. Further, the Committee requests the Division, in consultation with the Bureau, to review existing studies and information notes published by the Division and to make proposals with regard to those that need updating, also keeping in mind the need for the preparation of informational material for the general public, as mentioned above. The Committee also requests the Division to explore the possibility of preparing a study on the work of the United Nations Conciliation Commission.

**Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority**

35. The Committee considers that this useful programme, carried out in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, should be continued and strengthened, drawing on the expertise of the relevant United Nations institutions. The Committee considers that the experience gained by the Division in the previous years of the training programme should be evaluated, in consultation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, with a view to further maximizing the programme's usefulness for Palestinian Authority trainees.

**Observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**

36. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People will be observed on Monday, 29 November 1999. It is envisaged that the observance will take place at United Nations Headquarters, at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna and elsewhere in accordance with established practice.

37. The Committee will again commemorate this anniversary with a solemn meeting and other activities, including, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, the presentation of a cultural exhibit at United Nations Headquarters during the week beginning 29 November 1999.

38. The Committee will continue to review and assess its programme of work on the basis of experience and in the light of new developments and in order to make additional adjustments as needed.

## II. TENTH EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESUMED; RESOLUTION ADOPTED

*At the request of the Group of Arab States (see A/ES-10/31), as well as the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/ES-10/32), the General Assembly, on 5 and 9 February1999, for the fourth time resumed its tenth emergency special session. The Assembly considered agenda item 5, entitled "Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory". The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People made a statement, the text of which is reproduced below:*

**Mr. Ka** (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): At its emergency special session held almost a year ago, the General Assembly undertook to consider the disquieting situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, stemming from the Israeli Government's illegal policies and measures.

Today we find ourselves meeting once again, after the main part of the regular session of the General Assembly, to reconsider that very same question.

In recent months, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People had been under the impression that progress in the peace process was still possible and that we would be able to break the deadlock. Indeed, in October last, following significant diplomatic efforts on the part of the President of the United States and the King of Jordan, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Arafat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, signed the Wye River Memorandum.

I should like here to note that King Hussein of Jordan, although ill at the time, played an active part in the conclusion of that agreement. Together with the fraternal people of Jordan, we all are praying for his prompt recovery.

The encouraging breakthrough represented by the Wye River Memorandum, which was favourably received by the international community, offered genuine grounds for hope to the Palestinians and to all those who desire a rapid conclusion to the peace process.

In the message he delivered in November 1998 on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, President Arafat stated that the Memorandum was a harbinger of great hope for the peoples of the region and for the Palestinian people in particular. He was convinced that this fresh impetus would put the peace process back on track. He also expressed the hope that international pressure would induce the Israeli Government to fulfil the obligations it undertook pursuant to that Memorandum, thereby making it possible for peace talks to be resumed and for final-status discussions to be undertaken in a climate of trust, respect and mutual understanding.

Unfortunately, the peace process is still beset by uncertainty, for fresh obstacles have arisen that are blocking the way to the full realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

On 20 December 1998, the Israeli Cabinet took a decision whose effect was quite simply to suspend the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum. It imposed additional conditions on the Palestinian side, and any subsequent deployment of Israeli troops remains in doubt. That decision attests once again to the Israeli side's lack of good faith, since it always reneges on agreements it has entered into. The imposition of fresh conditions can only result in delays and bring disillusionment and disappointment to the Palestinian people.

No sooner was the October Memorandum signed than a series of extremely disquieting events took place. On 1 November, Jewish settlers resumed work, with the authorization of the Israeli Government, on the site of a Jewish settlement on the Ras-Al-Amoud sector of East Jerusalem. The day before, Israel had announced the construction of a new 200-dwelling addition to the Kiryat Arba settlement, to the east of Al-Khalil, or Hebron.

On 12 November 1998, Israel began the tendering process for the construction of a new settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of East Jerusalem.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continues to deteriorate as a result of the violence, humiliations, frustrations and tension, which are intensifying day by day. Violent clashes between Palestinian residents and Jewish settlers have taken place recently in Hebron as well as on the roads, at the barriers erected by settlers against Palestinian vehicles. None of this is new. These regrettable incidents simply add to the mistrust, despair and hardship of a people whose suffering has gone on for many decades and which aspires only to peace in conditions of dignity and of respect for its inalienable rights.

A step recently taken by the Israeli Parliament has further dimmed hopes. On 26 January 1999, the Knesset adopted a law whose basic objective is to

block future negotiations by tightening the conditions for the restoration of land to the Palestinians of East Jerusalem and to the Syrian Arab Republic in the occupied Syrian Golan.

For several years now, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has been striving to alert the international community to the tragic plight of these people and to their precarious living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

In the course of the past year, the General Assembly, at its regular session and at its tenth emergency special session, reviewed the human rights situation of the Arab population in the occupied Palestinian territories. It underscored the fact that all of the measures taken by Israel were unlawful and in flagrant violation of the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Israel, bound *de jure* by the provisions of that Convention, to which it is a party, has consistently violated the provisions of that international instrument, whose fiftieth anniversary we will shortly be commemorating.

In view of these repeated acts of violence and these frequent denials of rights, the Assembly recommended that the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should convene a conference on the measures to be taken to apply and enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. It also recommended to the Government of Switzerland, the depositary of the Convention, that it take the necessary steps to convene first a meeting of experts and then the Conference of States Parties.

As members know, the meeting of experts on the Fourth Geneva Convention took place from 27 to 29 October 1998 under the chairmanship of Switzerland. The experts studied issues relating to the implementation of the Convention in general, and to its application in the occupied territories in particular. They reviewed ways to resolve all the issues that had been raised. The convening of that meeting of experts, which was part of a series of measures envisaged by States parties, was most useful; but we are obliged to note that, even though a full year has passed, no decision has been taken on a specific date to convene a conference of High Contracting Parties.

In the light of the decision to suspend implementation of the Wye River Memorandum and Israel's persistent non-compliance with the provisions of the Convention and of resolutions ES-10/2, ES-10/3, ES-10/4 and ES-10/5, and in the light of the deterioration of the peace process in spite of all the efforts and sacrifices that have been made, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People considers that the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties at a specific date is of increasingly crucial importance.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I appeal to the members of the international community to support the draft resolution calling for the prompt convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

On 9 February 1999, by a vote of 115 to 2, with 5 abstentions, the General Assembly adopted a resolution, the text of which is reproduced below:

**ES-10/6. Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

*The General Assembly*,

*Reaffirming* the resolutions of its tenth emergency special session, namely, ES-10/2 of 25 April 1997, ES-10/3 of 15 July 1997, ES-10/4 of 13 November 1997 and ES-10/5 of 17 March 1998,

*Determined* to uphold the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and all

other instruments of international law, as well as relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions,

*Reiterating* the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is solved in all its aspects,

*Aware* that Israel, the occupying Power, has not heeded the demands made in the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session and that it continues to carry out illegal actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular settlement activity, including the construction of the new Israeli settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim, the building of other new settlements and the expansion of existing settlements, the construction of bypass roads and the confiscation of lands,

*Reaffirming* that all illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially settlement activities and the practical results thereof, remain contrary to international law and cannot be recognized, irrespective of the passage of time,

*Expressing its appreciation* to the Government of Switzerland, in its capacity as depositary of the four Geneva Conventions, 1/ and to the International Committee of the Red Cross for their efforts to uphold the integrity of the Conventions,

*Increasingly concerned* about the persistent violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, 2/

*Conscious* of the serious dangers arising from persistent violations and grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the responsibilities arising therefrom,

*Aware* of the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, which is an occasion for renewed determination to promote international humanitarian law further and to reaffirm the undertaking by the High Contracting Parties to respect and to ensure respect for the Conventions in all circumstances in accordance with common article 1,

*Taking note* of the measure taken by the Government of Switzerland to organize a meeting between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, in the presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which was held at Geneva from 9 to 11 June 1998 and was aimed at examining ways to contribute to the effective application of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and expressing disappointment that Israeli violations of the Convention continued unabated in spite of such a measure,

*Taking note also* of the meeting of experts of the High Contracting Parties, convened from 27 to 29 October 1998 at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland, in its capacity as the depositary of the Convention, on general problems concerning the Convention, in particular in occupied territories, as well as of the Chairman's report of the proceedings of that meeting,

*Gravely concerned* at the suspension, on 20 December 1998, by the Government of Israel of the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum, signed at the White House in Washington, D.C., on 23 October 1998, including the negotiations on the final settlement, which should be concluded by 4 May 1999,

*Determined* to persist in its work to bring about compliance by Israel, the occupying Power, with the terms of resolutions adopted by the tenth emergency special session,

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1/ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, Nos. 970-973.

2/ Ibid., No. 973.

*Aware* that, under the circumstances, it should continue to consider the situation with a view to making appropriate recommendations to the States Members of the United Nations in accordance with General Assembly resolution 377 A (V) of 3 November 1950,

1. *Reiterates its condemnation* of the failure of the Government of Israel to comply with the provisions of resolutions ES-10/2, ES-10/3, ES-10/4 and ES-10/5;

2. *Expresses its grave concern* at the adoption by the Knesset of the law of 26 January 1999 and the legislation of 27 January 1999, and reaffirms that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character, legal status and demographic composition of Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory are all null and void and have no validity whatsoever;

3. *Reiterates* in the strongest terms all the demands made of Israel, the occupying Power, in the above-mentioned resolutions of the tenth emergency special session, including the immediate and full cessation of the construction at Jebel Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Occupied East Jerusalem, the acceptance of the *de jure* applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention and compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the cessation and reversal of all actions taken illegally against Palestinian Jerusalemites and the provision of information about goods produced or manufactured in the settlements;

4. *Reiterates also* its previous recommendations to Member States for the cessation of all forms of assistance and support for illegal Israeli activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, in particular settlement activities, and actively to discourage activities that directly contribute to any construction or development of those settlements;

5. *Affirms* that, in spite of the actual deterioration of the Middle East peace process as a result of the lack of compliance by the Government of Israel with the existing agreements, increased efforts must be exerted to bring the peace process back on track and to continue the process towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, as well as Security Council resolution 425 (1978);

6. *Reiterates* its recommendation that the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and to ensure respect thereof in accordance with common article 1, and further recommends that the High Contracting Parties convene the said conference on 15 July 1999 at the United Nations Office at Geneva;

7. *Invites* the Government of Switzerland, in its capacity as the depositary of the Geneva Convention, to undertake whatever preparations are necessary prior to the conference;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to make the necessary facilities available to enable the High Contracting Parties to convene the conference;

9. *Expresses its confidence* that Palestine, as a party directly concerned, will participate in the above-mentioned conference;

10. *Decides* to adjourn the tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the most recent General Assembly to resume its meeting upon request from Member States.

*12th plenary meeting*
*9 February 1999*

## III. BETHLEHEM 2000 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD IN ROME ON 18 AND 19 FEBRUARY 1999

*The Bethlehem 2000 International Conference was held in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999. The Conference was organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.*

*High-level officials attended the conference, including The Honourable Francesco Rutelli, Mayor of Rome; Sir Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations; His Eminence Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, President of the Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and Head of the Holy See delegation; H.E. Mr. Jacques Baudin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal; H.E. Dr. Azeddine Laraki, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; H.E. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; H.E. Mr. Lamberto Dini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Italian Republic; and H.E. Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.*

*The high-level plenary entitled "Celebrating the new millennium in a global vision of peace and reconciliation" was addressed by H.E. Mr. Said Kamal, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; His Beatitude Msgr. Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem; the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; Reverend Father Archpriest Victor Petlyuchenko, Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Moscow Patriarchate, Representative of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia; His Eminence Cardinal Anba Moussa, General Archpriest, Representative of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III; His Eminence The Metropolitan of Switzerland, Damaskinos Papandreou, Representative of His Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch; Ambassador Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, President of the Islamic Cultural Centre, Rome; Mr. Dwain C. Epps, Director, Programme Unit III - Justice, Peace and Creation, World Council of Churches; and the Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, Director of Sabeel, Jerusalem.*

*The plenary entitled "Preparing for the millennium celebrations" was addressed by H.E. Dr. Nabeel Kassis, Minister, Coordinator-General of the Bethlehem 2000 Project Authority; Mr. Hanna Nasser, Mayor of Bethlehem; Mr. Nabil Sarraf, Vice-President, Palestine Development and Investment Company; and Mr. Valdo Spini, President of the Parliamentary Association, Italy/Israel.*

*The plenary entitled "Voices and responsibilities of Parliaments: Initiatives in connection with Bethlehem 2000" was addressed by Mr. Miguel Angel Martinez, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Council; The Honourable Luciano Violante, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies; Senator Domenico Fisichella, Vice-President of the Italian Senate, on behalf of The Honourable Nicola Mancino, President of the Italian Senate; Mr. Humayun Rasheed Choudhury, Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament; and H.E. Mr. Nahad Ibrahim Abdel Latif, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of Dr. Ahmed Fathi Sourour, Speaker of the People's Assembly, President of the Arab Parliamentary Council.*

*The closing session was addressed by H.E. Mr. Rino Serri, Senator, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, representative of the host Government; Dr. Nabeel Kassis, Minister, Coordinator-General of the Bethlehem*

*2000 Project Authority, Representative of Palestine; and H.E. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.*

*The Committee delegation was composed of H.E. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; H.E. Dr. Ravan Farhâdi (Afghanistan) and H.E. Mr. Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba), Vice-Chairmen of the Committee; H.E. Mr. George Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur; H.E. Mme. Mahawa Bangoura Camara (Guinea), member of the Committee; and H.E. Dr. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine).*

*At the end of the two-day session, H.E. Mr. George Saliba, Rapporteur of the Committee, presented the Rome Declaration on Bethlehem 2000. The following is the full text of the Declaration:*

**The Rome Declaration on Bethlehem 2000**

1. In the year 2000, the past and the future will meet in Bethlehem in a global vision of hope and peace for all peoples. The world will celebrate the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ and the dawning of the third millennium. This event is of paramount importance not only for the Palestinian people and for the region, but also for the believers of the world and for the international community as a whole.

2. The Bethlehem 2000 International Conference was held in Rome, on 18 and 19 February 1999, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Participants in the Conference included eminent political and religious personalities, among others, H.E. Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal, the President of the Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Mayor of Rome, representatives of Governments, including donor countries, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system organizations and agencies, parliamentarians, the Bethlehem Municipality and non-governmental organizations.

3. During the Conference, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the delegation of the Committee had the honour and privilege of being received by His Excellency Dr. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, President of the Italian Republic, who expressed the readiness of his country to continue to make every effort aimed at bringing the peace process back on track.

4. The delegation of the Committee was also received by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who encouraged the Committee's endeavours and sent his blessings for the success of the coming celebrations in Bethlehem in true spirit of peace, tolerance and reconciliation among all the peoples on earth.

5. The Conference underscored the monumental importance attached worldwide to honouring the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. It recognized and celebrated the history and the future of the Palestinian city of Bethlehem – the birthplace of Jesus Christ - as a place of peace.

6. The Conference was aimed also at supporting and promoting the Bethlehem 2000 Project launched by the Palestinian Authority and at ensuring the greatest possible international participation in its realization. The Conference also highlighted the urgency of bringing economic recovery and prosperity to the Palestinian people following decades of conflict and dispossession.

7. The inclusion by the United Nations General Assembly of an item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" in the agenda of its fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions was viewed as a major step towards increasing the

engagement and participation of the international community in the Bethlehem 2000 Project. The participants also welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 53/27 of 18 November 1998 without a vote and considered it as a clear reflection of the world community's strong desire to bring the era of dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation to the people of Bethlehem and the entire Middle East.

8. The Conference participants noted the important work done by the Palestinian Authority on the various aspects of the Bethlehem 2000 Project. The participants reviewed the status and the needs of the Project, as well as the difficulties the Palestinian Authority faced in its implementation. They emphasized the urgency of making concrete improvements in the situation on the ground in the city and its vicinity. The participants also stressed the need for the development of Bethlehem's municipal infrastructure and public services, the preservation of its rich cultural heritage, tourist development and private sector. Freedom of movement and unhindered access to the Holy Places in Bethlehem by the faithful of all religions and nationalities are essential to the city's revival. The reconstruction of historical sites in this Holy Land should become a fitting tribute to the spiritual significance of Bethlehem – a symbol of enduring hope, harmony and peace.

9. The participants were encouraged by the assistance of the international donor community in reconstructing and rehabilitating the Palestinian economy and in particular, the engagement of donor countries, agencies and the private sector in various projects in the city of Bethlehem. In that regard, the participants welcomed the Bethlehem 2000 Participants Conference held in Brussels in May 1998. The Conference also thanked the Governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector who participated in the Conference. Their participation demonstrated the broad international support for the Bethlehem 2000 initiative.

10. The participants also recognized the important role played by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank and other organizations and agencies of the United Nations system in ensuring the success of this major undertaking.

11. The participation in the Conference of His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, was welcomed by the participants. They expressed their appreciation for his untiring efforts and leadership in the quest for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

12. The participants expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to the Government of Italy for hosting the Conference and for the generous financial contribution towards the promotion of this important event.

13. The participants would like to thank in particular His Excellency Dr. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, President of the Italian Republic, the Government of Italy, The Honourable Francesco Rutelli, Mayor of Rome, and Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, for their support of the Conference.

*Rome, 19 February 1999*

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